A Recipe for Reaching Out

Foresters and other natural resource professionals with agencies and nonprofit groups can use this recipe to create an opportunity for people who traditionally have not been involved in urban and community forestry. The information on this card is taken from the following publication: McDonough, Maureen; Russell, Kasey; Nancarrow, Lee; Burban, Lisa. 2003. *Dialogue on Diversity: Broadening the voices in urban and community forestry.* NA-IN-03-03. Saint Paul, MN: USDA Forest Service, Northeastern Area, State and Private Forestry and Michigan State University.

Ingredients

- Local partner and/or trusted community member
- Specific meeting, event, or activity
- Intense outreach, phone calls and personal contacts
- Diverse community members
- Good contact records
- Diverse foresters/natural resource professionals (when available)
- Convenient, neutral location
- Trained facilitators
- Refreshments (if budget allows)

Special Tools Needed

- Lots of time
- Energy
- Patience
- Enthusiasm
- Commitment
- Creative ideas
- Two-way communication
- Willingness to nurture and compromise
- Ability to expand beyond comfort zone

1) Have a goal in mind. Before you start, spend some time thinking about the type of activity in which you want to diversify involvement. For example, does your grant program accurately reflect all constituents? Are your workshops always attended by the same people?

2) Find a local partner and identify community leaders. Talk to church leaders, community groups, neighborhood associations, school system administrators, chambers of commerce, garden clubs, and youth organizations. Churches and chambers of commerce may not have a direct role in urban forestry, but their members are organized, representative of their community, and are often active and concerned. Once given access to natural resources information and ideas for natural resources projects, these groups can serve as effective partners in spreading the word on natural resources management.

3) Identify a specific meeting, event, or activity. It is very important to involve community leaders in actual event or meeting planning. This will ensure that you don't organize something no one is interested in.

4) Identify and work in locations that are comfortable, convenient, and neutral for the community. Make sure the dates and times are also convenient. Work with your community contact because they will often be the best source of advice on these special considerations.

5) Reach out through phone calls or meetings. Contact and meet with community leaders, organizations, and club members. Request names of other colleagues, community leaders, and community groups. Typically, each person will give you an additional 5 to 10 names. Contact every person whose name you are given. You will find that not every person you speak to is interested, but some will be. It is up to you to find them. It is important that you keep good records during this process so you can easily find the names and the people again.

6) Send invitation letters. Be sure to send them out well in advance – about one month before an event. Don't expect one letter to do the trick. Send out reminder post cards or, preferably, follow up with phone calls. Address the letter to an actual person, not "to whom it may concern." It is great if local community groups can send out the letters for you on their own letterhead to give you more credibility.

7) Make follow-up phone calls. About one week before the event, call as many people that you invited as you can. You might not have time to call everyone, but the people you call will be the ones most likely to participate.

8) Hold the event or sponsor the activity. If your budget allows, serve refreshments. Be sure that people have an opportunity to participate, to talk with each other and with you, and to make contacts for further projects. Dialogue and listening are very important. This is a wonderful opportunity for people to network and connect. Be prepared to offer business cards, website information, or handout materials that give participants access to further information and assistance.

9) Be sure to follow up afterwards. Take time to thank everyone for helping you plan the event and for attending. Often the people who help you may not be able to attend the event; thank them anyway. Send promised information, and follow up with actual plans or projects.

10) Maintain the relationships just created. Involve new people in a specific activity right away to maintain their interest. Add the names of participants to newsletters and information distribution lists. If appropriate, identify individuals who seemed particularly interested and invite them to participate in other related activities (tree board membership, volunteer planting days, advisory committees). Make sure these individuals receive any materials or information developed as a result of the meeting.

Tips for Success

- **Research the community where your activity or meeting is planned. You must develop trust which is a long process. It will not happen overnight. Through your research, you will learn about the community and various underrepresented groups.**
- **Have your partner be an integral part of the process from the beginning.**
- **You must make personal contact to get people to participate; this takes more time than traditional approaches to community outreach. Letters or news articles alone will not be enough.**
- **Be sure people can actually participate. Don't just lecture to them. Create opportunities for people to talk with each other and establish relationships. Encourage dialogue and sharing.**
- **Listen without being defensive.**
- **Make sure you meet the community's needs. Be prepared to follow through with tangible results. Don't make promises you cannot keep. Remember you are not alone and you can serve as a contact or liaison to other natural resources groups and organizations.**
- **Keep good records from the meeting/event. Don't lose the progress you made by not keeping track of your new contacts.**
- **It's okay to be uncomfortable. At the beginning, things may not always be pleasant and positive. Just because people are not already engaged or involved in urban and community forestry issues does not mean they do not have opinions.**

NA-IN-03-03

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September 2003

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